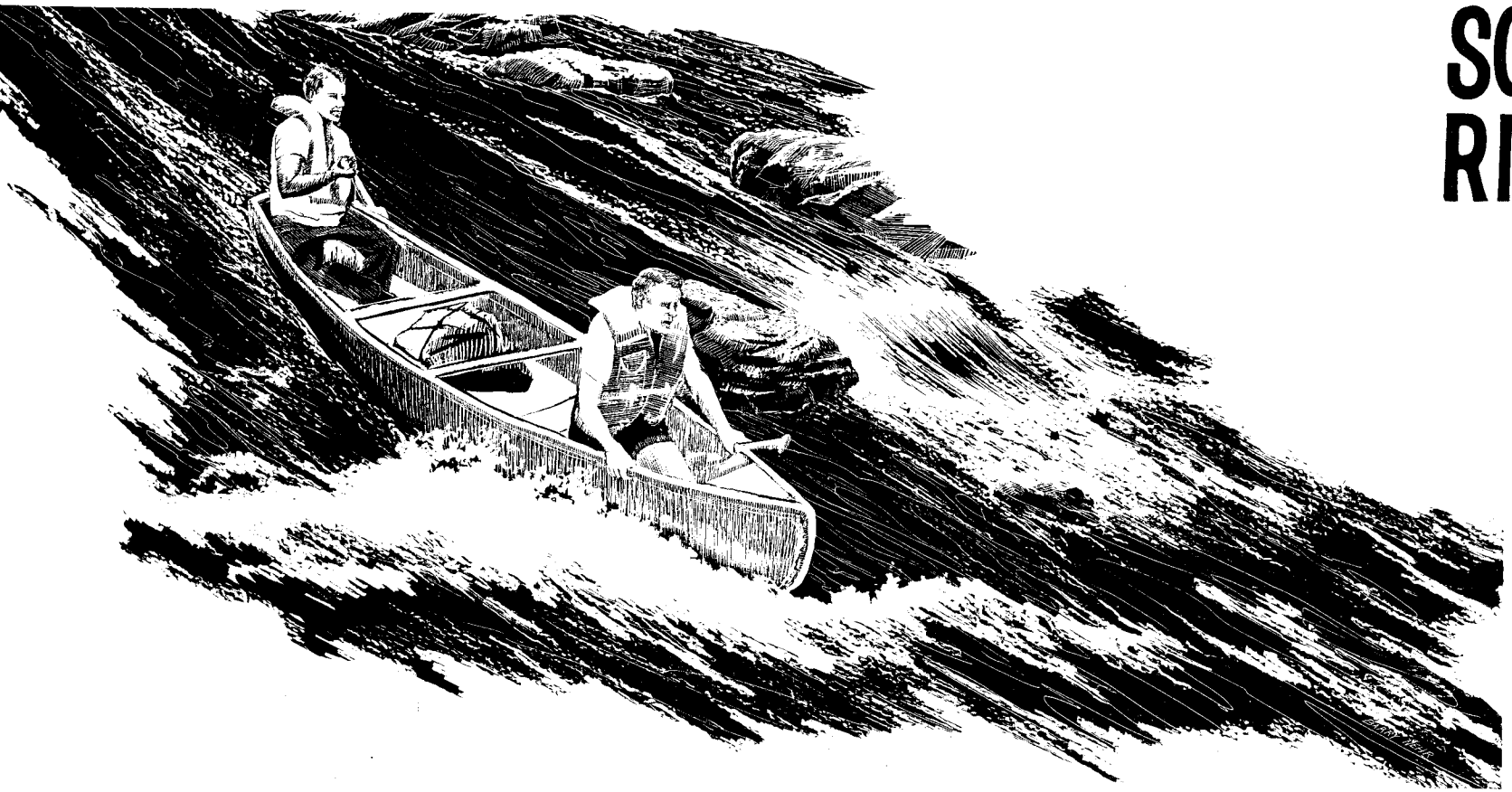
CHATTOOGA RIVER

AS A WILD AND SCENIC RIVER



U.S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE-SOUTHERN REGION

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a study of the Chattooga River for potential designation as a National Wild and Scenic River. The Chattooga River in North Carolina, Georgia and South Carolina, is one of 27 rivers designated for study by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 90-542).

This is a summary of the information gathered by the Forest Service and contained in the parent report "Wild and Scenic River Study Report – Chattooga River".

FINDING

The Chattooga River and its major tributary, the West Fork, fully meet the criteria established by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The river and its environment would make a worthy addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Chattooga River, from Tugaloo Lake 49.6 miles upstream to a point near Cashiers, North Carolina, and 7.3 miles of the West Fork be designated as a unit of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

As a component of this system, it is recommended the river be administered by the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture. The majority of the river and adjoining lands are presently managed by this agency.

the river

The Chattooga River begins on the crest of the Blue Ridge in mountainous North Carolina. It begins as small rivulets, nourished by springs and abundant rainfall, high on the slopes of the Appalachian Mountains—the start of a fifty mile journey that ends at Lake Tugaloo between Georgia and South Carolina. From its origin it flows southward for ten miles in North Carolina, and then continues for forty miles on the state boundary between South Carolina and Georgia.

The river is unique. It is one of the few remaining free-flowing streams in the Southeast. The setting is primitive, with dense forests and relatively undeveloped shorelines. The Chattooga is the only mountain river in the four-state area of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee without substantial commercial, agricultural or residential development along its shores. Visitors are instantly transported into an unspoiled, whitewater environment.

Near the headwaters, the river is small, spilling freely over small ledges and waterfalls with its course not yet defined. As the waters gather in a definite channel between dense forested slopes, it enters the Chattooga River gorge. The narrow gorge, carved by the stream in many years of geologic time, confines the clear water to its steepest course. In the next twenty miles it rushes as turbulent whitewater through remote country. It follows a narrow twisting route over continuous rapids, swirling around huge boulders and through self-cut rock flumes slowing only occasionally in quiet deep pools.

At the end of this stretch the river is released from the gorge and for six miles flows wider and smoothly through an area bounded by old fields, farms and summer homes. The West Fork joins the main river here, adding its abundant flow and providing easy canoeing water through an area of pastoral scenery.

State Highway 28 parallels the quiet water for a short distance here and affords easy access for canoeists and fishermen. Only five roads cross the river in the entire length indicating the inaccessibility except by canoe or hiking.

The next sixteen miles offer the river traveler a variety of conditions. Challenging rapids to shoot; broad quiet stretches to rest in and enjoy the mountain scenery; narrow swift rushes over cascades and ledges requiring a portage. An exciting two-day run with overnight camping on a sandbar is possible on this stretch.

Below the bridge crossing of U. S. Highway 76 the river enters the most exciting and treacherous stretch of whitewater rapids in its entire length. In a three mile segment there are over 48 major rapids and cascades. Enormous boulders and unusual rock formations are common. At one point the river flows through an impressive gorge with cliffs on the east side rising over 400 feet above the water. A short distance beyond this, the Chattooga River ends its journey in the placid waters of Lake Tugaloo.

The West Fork, flowing entirely in Georgia, is accessible only on foot above the Overflow Bridge. The stream is too swift and rocky for canoeing or floating. Below the bridge it changes abruptly—from whitewater to continuous smooth water—ideal for the beginning canoeist. The total length of the West Fork suitable for classification is 7.5 miles.

Ribbon Falls

Whitesides Mountain

the river environment

TOPOGRAPHY

The Appalachian Mountains are old, perhaps the oldest mountain chain in America, their origin buried in geologic ageing processes. The weathering process that has occurred over eons of time is evident as you view these mountains. Their summits are rounded and the higher slopes are less steep than the valley sides. Crags, bare cliffs, and talus slopes that are commonly associated with younger mountains are rare.

The massive face of the Blue Ridge Escarpment is marked by a number of deep gorges representing millions of years of carving by waterborne sands. The Chattooga River flows for a major portion of its length through one of these gorges. The topographic character of the area is abrupt, with most slopes ranging from 20 to 80 percent. Vertical slopes of exposed rock 200-400 feet high like the Chattooga Cliffs and Raven Rock Cliffs are occasionally found along the river. Whitesides Mountain, a granite monolith with sheer rock walls rising 2,000 feet above the surrounding valley floor, is located near the headwaters in North Carolina.

Elevations along the river range from 4800 feet on the crest of the Blue Ridge to 891 feet at Tugaloo Lake. In this distance of 50 miles the waters of the Chattooga River descend 2469 feet, an average drop of 49 feet per mile.

CLIMATE

Topography divides the Chattooga drainage into two climatic zones. In the northern part, the climate is influenced by the higher elevations—winters are cold, summers are mild. During summer months evening temperatures require a sweater or jacket and sleeping is comfortable. With rainfall averaging 80 inches per year, raingear comes in handy at all times. The climate of the southern part of the river is more humid with hot summers and cool winters. Weather conditions are suitable from May to September for extended float trips even when frequent upsets and dunkings occur. Pleasant daytime temperatures and cool nights make this five-month season enjoyable for fishing and overnight camping along the river. Wintertime activities on the river are limited since air temperatures frequently fall below freezing.

FISHERIES

The cool waters of the upper Chattooga support a sizeable trout population. As the water warms in the lower regions, redeye bass replace the trout for sport fishing. Brown trout are dominant in the main river with brook trout found in most of the tributaries. Some of the deep holes have produced trophy sized fish.

FOREST – VEGETATION

A rich variety of plant life is present in the Chattooga River drainage. Wide differences in elevation and high rainfall combine to create a unique environment, supporting many kinds of plant communities. Dominant among these communities is the hardwood forest with its many varieties of species. White, black, scarlet, northern red and chestnut oak are present along with hickory, yellow poplar, basswood and red maple. Other minor species include black cherry, walnut, cucumber, ash and gum.

Many stands, especially on north facing slopes, are dominated by the majestic Eastern white pine. Important because of the beauty of their flowers or foliage are dogwood, sourwood, mountain laurel, and rhododendron.

Several rare plant species occur along the Chattooga. Mountain camellia is found along Dick's Creek. The rare Shortia plant is found along Reed Creek and just above Burrells Ford. These areas, described first by pioneer botanist William Bartram, are still rich in botanical varieties including many species of wild orchid, fern, ground pine, lily, trillium and violets.

EARLY HISTORY AND POINTS OF INTEREST

The Chattooga flows through an area rich in settler and Indian history and outstanding scenic features. The cultural history of the area extends back beyond the first white settlements in the region. Prior to 1700, this was the land of the Cherokee Indian and is still rich in Cherokee history, legends and artifacts. The routes of old Indian trails can still be traced and are an interesting part of the area.

White man did not visit this mountain country until the early 1700's. The earliest records of this are hunter maps dated 1730 and 1751. The earliest farm settlement by the white man was in the Chattooga River Gorge near Monroe House where the remains of an old chimney can still be seen. About 50 acres of land were cleared here in 1830.

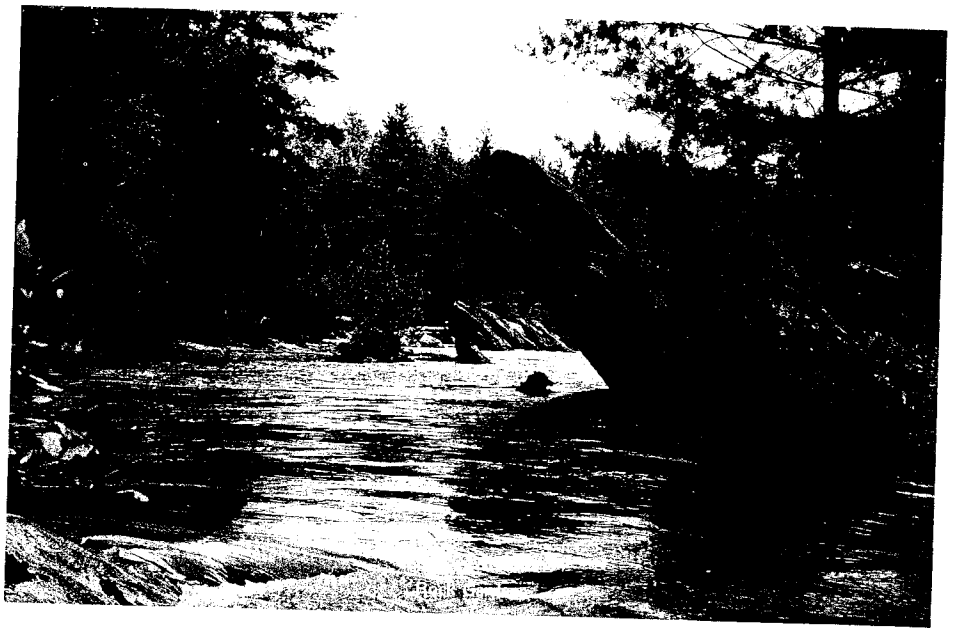
Scenic features of interest to river travelers are:

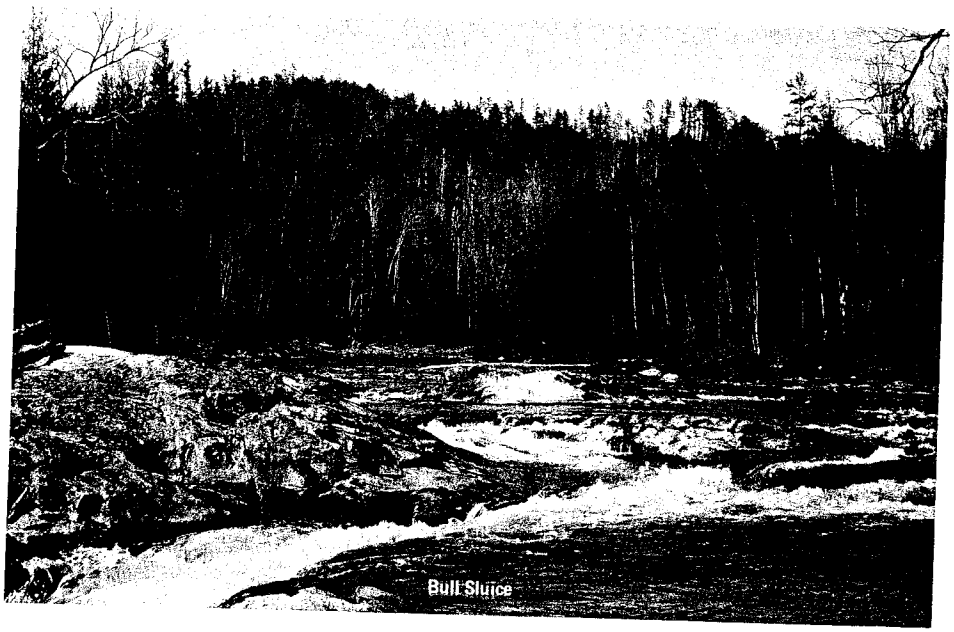
Ribbon Falls	A small but spectacular waterfalls cascading 75 feet down the mountainside on the extreme headwaters.
Chattooga Cliffs	A series of prominent smooth-faced granite outcrops exposed 400 to 600 feet above the river.
The Rock Garden	A series of spectacular rock formations where geologic weathering has left large slabs of rock sticking up to 25 feet out of the river at a sharp angle.
Bull Sluice	A 10 foot high falls dropping over a large rock formation, treacherous for canoeists.
Dick's Creek Falls	A classic waterfalls dropping 50 feet over a steep ledge into the river.

Both the Chattooga River and West Fork contain a scenic array of rapids, cascades, waterfalls, shoals and other dramatic geologic formations.

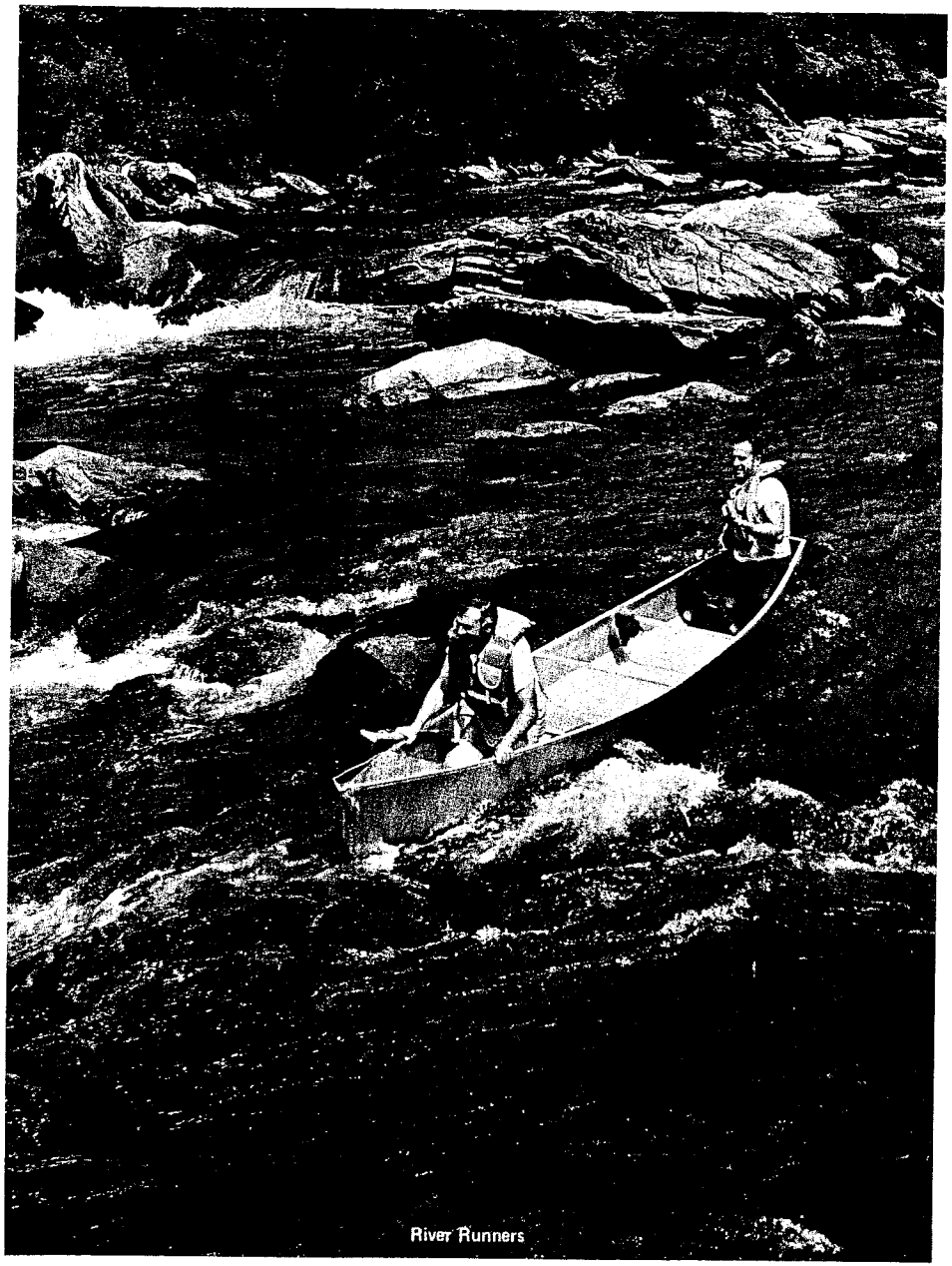
LAND USES

Most land use along the river occurs on the small tracts of private land. A number of summer homes are present in areas near the headwaters in North Carolina, and down river near State Highway 28 in South Carolina. While most of these dwellings are within the proposed boundary, some are not visible from the river, yet most detract from the aesthetic qualities of the river landscape.





Bull Sluice



River Runners

A few old farms with their abandoned fields and pastures, now being reforested with small trees, create welcome openings in the forested shoreline. Major bridges occur at U. S. Highway 76, State Highway 28, Burrells Ford and Grimshawes. These structures permit easy access to the river and allow concentrations of use by fishermen, boaters, picnickers and campers. Three power transmission lines cross the river, two above Grimshawes Bridge in North Carolina and one crossing the West Fork near Warwoman Bridge. The Forest Service campground at Burrells Ford accounts for much of the camping use along the river.

Numerous fishermen trails or paths can be found near the major access points, especially at bridges. These are indicators of the concentrated use occurring at these areas. Old logging roads are now used by jeeps to gain access to the river in many otherwise inaccessible spots.

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Although fishing accounts for most recreation use, there are other attractions to the river.

The canoeist and floater are showing up in increasing numbers to experience the challenge of the river. Sections of the river are ideal for floating in canoes and rubber rafts. Motorized boat use is impractical because of shallow water and rocks.

The only camping facilities along the river are provided at a campground near Burrells Ford in South Carolina. River runners on extended float trips can enjoy camping under primitive conditions at many sites along the river.

Hiking provides another way of seeing the river. There is only one developed trail extending the four miles from Burrells Ford to Ellicotts Rock. However, most of the shoreline is accessible to those hikers willing to test themselves against the rugged country.

The casual sightseer is offered only brief glimpses of the river at bridge crossings and access points. To see and enjoy much of the river requires considerable time and effort from the recreationist, whether he be fisherman, canoeist, hiker or camper.

Other major recreation attractions are located within 50 miles of the Chattooga River—

- The Highland-Cashiers resort area of North Carolina is an exclusive and popular vacation area of the Southeast.
- National Forests in Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee and North Carolina offer many forms of recreation.
- The Great Smokies National Park is the most heavily visited National Park in America.
- 21 major lakes and reservoirs including Hiwassee, Nantahala, Fontana, Tugaloo, Hartwell, Appalachia and Sidney Lanier offer extensive recreational opportunities.

Many smaller State and private recreation developments contribute to making the area surrounding the Chattooga River a complete vacation land in the southeastern United States.

the river's future

ALTERNATIVES

The study identified three alternatives for future use of the Chattooga River.

1. Maintain the Status Quo–let the river develop on a "come what may" basis.
2. Develop the river for hydroelectric power.
3. Include the river in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

STATUS QUO

Leaving the river to develop in the future much the same as it has in the past will probably result in maximum development of summer homes on the choice private lands and more public camping facilities constructed by the Forest Service and private land owners. Further encroachment on the river's shoreline by jeep roads can be expected as can increased use by fishermen and boat campers resulting in litter accumulation and site deterioration.

With overall river use increasing, pollution becomes a real and serious threat.

The system of orderly timber harvest practiced by both Georgia Power Company and the U. S. Forest Service could be expected to continue.

HYDROELECTRIC DEVELOPMENT

Since 1935 there have been four separate proposals for hydroelectric development of the river. Two by the U. S. Corp of Engineers, one by the U. S. Study Commission, Southeast River Basins in 1963, and more recently by the Federal Power Commission in 1969.

Most of the proposals call for a series of dam installations with power plants, each depending on the other for water release required for operation. Any series of dams on the Chattooga River would so seriously impair the free flowing quality of the river, reduce its length and regulate flows of the remaining stretches as to practically eliminate river character as we know it today.

These proposal reports indicate that the Chattooga River could help meet the power generation needs for the Southeast by the year 2000. Federal Power Commission report states "nearly two million kilowatts of installed capacity including both conventional hydroelectrical and pump storage installations in the Chattooga River Basin appear feasible for single purpose development. This latter capacity would help meet the need for future peaking capacity but it represents only a minor part of the total Region III needs by 1990." The Chattooga River could probably supply a minor part of the hydroelectric power needed for the southeast in the future. In contrast however, this rare river, much the same today as when man first saw it, is capable of supplying many intangible benefits to the people of the United States as a Wild and Scenic River.

WILD RIVER STATUS

Measuring the Chattooga River against criteria for wild and scenic rivers reveals its unique qualities. It is one of the few remaining rivers in the Southeast possessing free flowing white water in a primitive setting. For those eager to test this challenge, by floating it or walking beside it, it can provide a refreshing recreation experience. Seeing this river and meeting its challenge renews mental and physical energies to meet other tests in today's world.

Designating the Chattooga River as a Wild and Scenic River means some material values will be lost. The potential for hydroelectric development, although minor, will have to be found elsewhere–other rivers or through improved technology. Any losses to the forest products industry through cessation of logging within the proposed area can be offset by increases in volumes harvested on more productive lands.

Land ownership within the proposed boundary amounts to 47% National Forest, 37% Georgia Power Company and 16% in small private holdings. Almost all land owners are in favor of the proposal. The Georgia Power Company strongly supports the proposal and has begun land exchange negotiations with the Forest Service. Land acquisition by the Federal Government where needed will be on a "willing seller–willing buyer" basis.

CONCLUSION

Hydroelectric development would render the Chattooga River inelegible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Leaving the river to develop as it has in the past would cause the waters and scenery to deteriorate to the point that it would be just another river.

The report concludes that the Chattooga River should remain essentially free-flowing as it is today by including it in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

A Remote Section

the chattooga river as a wild and scenic river

BOUNDARY

The width of the proposed river boundary is based on protecting the river from all detrimental influences, especially land uses. The boundary width varies with the topogrpahy to include all land between the ridges on either side of the river. As the river is deeply entrenched in a gorge for most of its length, the high ridges on each side make a logical and easily recognized boundary, while acting as a barrier to outside influences. This boundary will average less than 1/4 mile wide on either side of the river. The total area within the proposed boundary is 15,143 acres.

SECTION CLASSIFICATION

The Chattooga River can be divided into six distinct sections under the "Guidelines for Evaluating Wild, Scenic and Recreational River Areas Proposed for Inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System under Section II, Public Law 90-542", agreed upon by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior. The West Fork is divided into two sections under these guidelines.

Section I – Scenic River Class

This section includes 5.5 miles of the headwaters and provides some of the most dramatic scenery found on the river. Although a large part of the shoreline is forested and undisturbed, the areas of rural development with farm houses, summer homes and several old bridges make it most suitable for scenic river classification.

Section II – Wild River Class

A 16 mile stretch that includes some beautiful but hazardous white water. Enormous boulders, some over 50 feet high with trees growing on top, rise from the river bed. In many places sheer rock outcrops and cliffs rise 400 to 600 feet above the river. The Chattooga Cliffs, a series of these outcrops continues along the river for two and one half miles.

Rafting or some method of floating is the best method to see this portion of the river, for many of the pools are 10–20 feet deep and impossible to wade by hikers and fishermen. The sheer rock cliffs and dense vegetation along the shoreline make it extremely difficult to hike on foot.

Section III – Recreation River Class

At the start of this six mile section, the river abruptly changes into a smooth stream, flowing quietly by an area of fields, farms and summer homes. This is the slowest flowing part of the entire river and is shallow and easy for the beginning canoeist. The open fields on each side of State Highway 28 were once the site of Chattooga Old Town, a large Indian settlement prior to 1600.

Section IV – Wild River Class

This division covers 15 miles to Bull Sluice just above U. S. Highway 76 bridge crossing. It has been called the most beautiful stretch of white water in the Southeast–unexcelled for both scenery and canoeing water.

Section V – Scenic River Class

This one mile segment has the qualities for wild classification were it not for the influence of U. S. Highway 76 Bridge. This highway and bridge allows easy access to the river here and the concentrated use by fishermen and boaters is evident. The remains of an old bridge, some evidence of sand mining, and a dirt access road to the water are located immediately adjacent to the bridge.

Section VI – Wild River Class

The final six miles to Tugaloo Lake is the most difficult stretch of white water on the river. It is rated by canoe experts as one of the most hazardous stretches of white water in America, attempted only by the most expert or foolhardy canoeists and floaters.

At Stekoa Creek the river becomes polluted from sewage being dumped by the City of Clayton, Georgia on the headwaters. The city is now constructing a sewage treatment plant and assures the Forest Service that the pollution problem will be corrected by late 1971.

Section VII – Wild River Class

This section includes a 3.3 mile portion of the West Fork of the Chattooga from Overflow Bridge upstream. The West Fork above Overflow Bridge is wild and inaccessible, without trails. The stream is small and rocky and the use of floating equipment is impractical. This part of the West Fork and the three creeks forming it, Holcomb, Big Creek and Overflow, are excellent trout streams.

Section VIII – Recreation River Class

In contrast to the river above the bridge, the 4 mile reach below Overflow Bridge is a complete change of character, from white water and primitive surroundings to a slow moving gentle stream. This stretch does not meet the criteria for wild or scenic rivers, largely because of the development of summer homes, farms, paralleling roads and other evidence of man's use along its shoreline. However, it does provide good water for canoeing, is easily accessible by road and meets the criteria for recreation rivers.

Minerals

The extraction of minerals through surface disturbances is incompatible with wild and scenic river objectives. Federal lands within one-quarter mile of the river will be withdrawn from mineral entry. If possible the mineral rights on any additional lands acquired within the boundary will be obtained.

Water

Water management activities will maintain or improve quality. Recreation management will take all possible steps to minimize the chance of water pollution from recreation activities. Because most of the water comes from outside the proposed boundary, the protection and improvement of the Chattooga water quality must be a joint effort between the Forest Service and state water quality agencies.

Land Acquisition

The private land within the proposed boundary involves 46 ownerships with the Georgia Power Company the largest landowner holding 5,690 acres. All private lands have been classified as to desirability of fee acquisition or scenic easement acquisition. These lands if needed will be acquired on a willing buyer-willing seller basis by either direct purchase or land-for-land exchange. In cases where fee title is not acquired, scenic easements will be obtained to protect river values.

Administration

The report recommends that the U. S. Forest Service administer the river as a unit of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. A river management plan will be prepared and the Forest Service will cooperate closely with the respective Game and Fish Commission and water quality agencies.

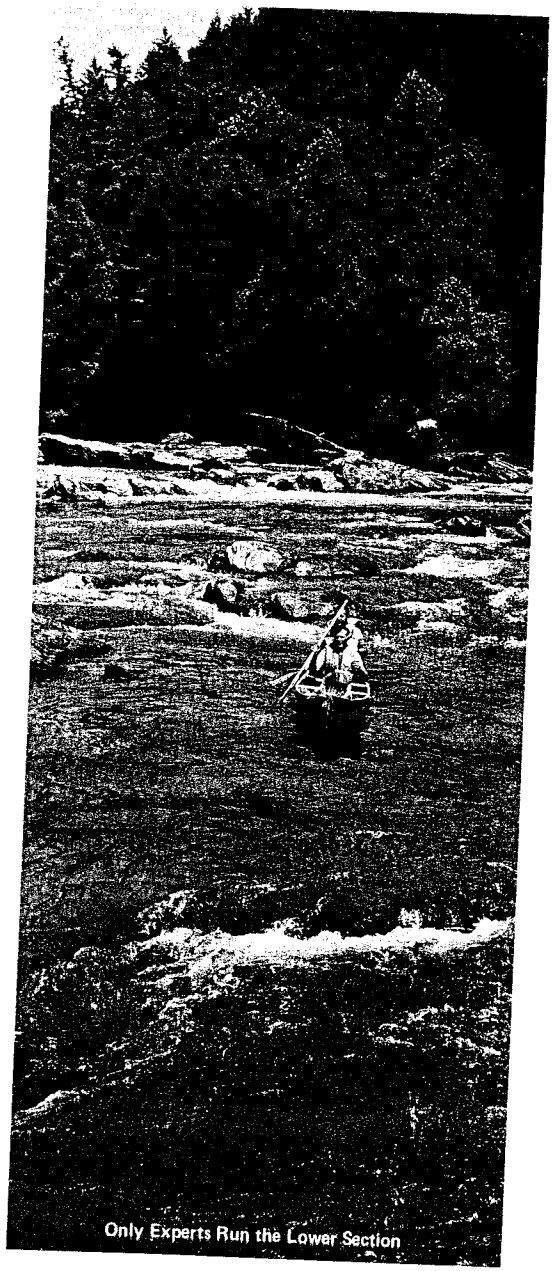
The Bench Mark System

A bench mark system will be established to measure and note change in the river's environment. Some change is inevitable. Some aspects of the environment are a dynamic, moving, living thing. The Chattooga is not a static resource that can be preserved for all time exactly as it is now. Designation of this as a National Wild and Scenic River can prevent development of the river by man, but it cannot halt the ageless geologic and ecological processes. Least noticeable are the geologic processes occurring over thousands of years that have resulted in the formation and weathering of the Appalachina Mountains. These geologic processes will continue in future years, slowly changing even the eternal rock of the mountains surrounding the river. More noticeable are the erosive changes wrought by the waters of the Chattooga as it continues to cut its way through the Blue Ridge Escarpment.

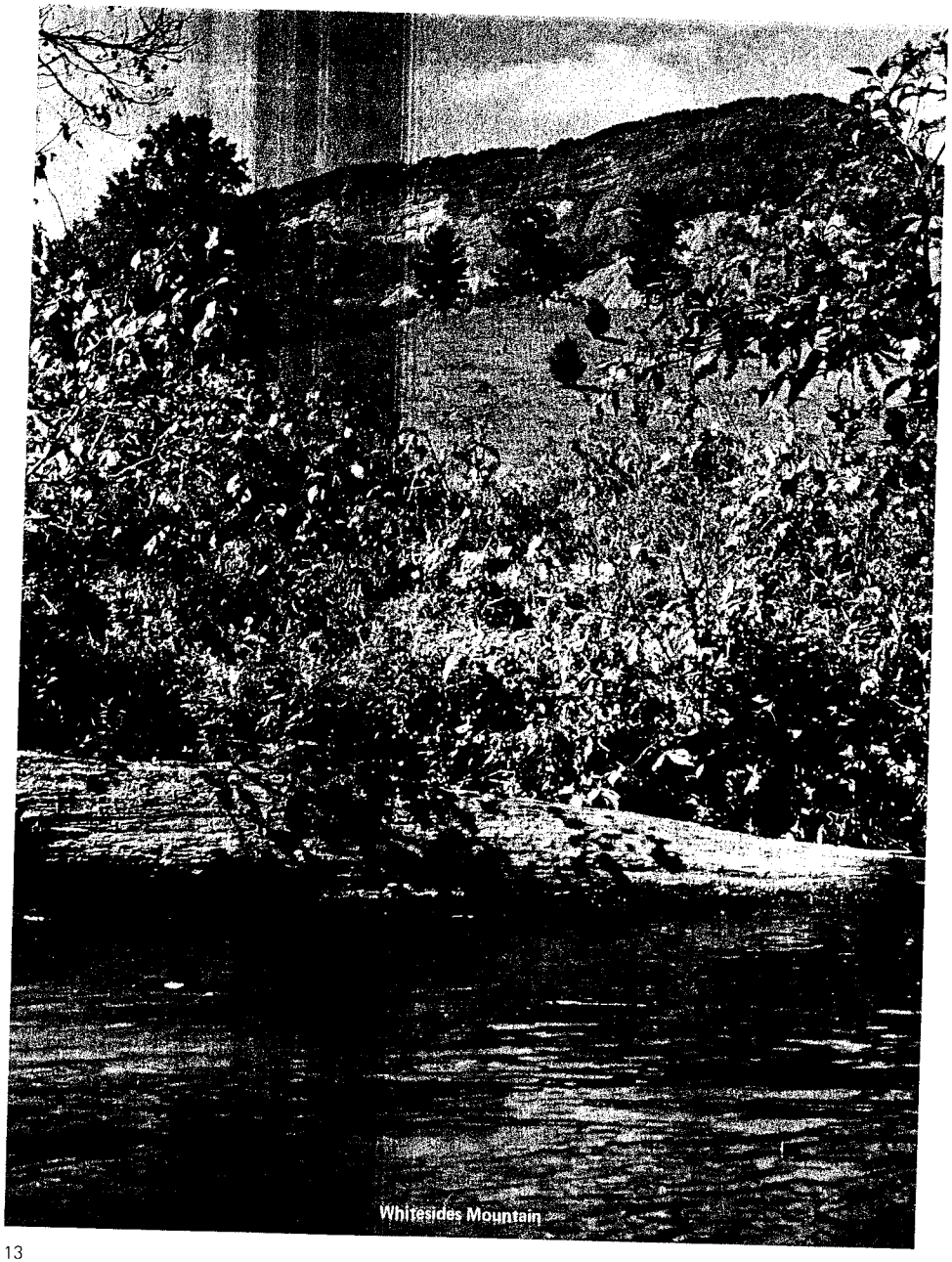
The forest vegetation that covers the steep hillsides is a living, growing, dying, everchanging resource. The abundance of tree and shrub species and the variety of composition are the result of timeless ecological changes as well as man's recent treatment of the area. The towering white pine, hemlock, and other species are successional species introduced and established after the "cut-out and get-out" logging era of the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Vegetation within the river boundary is always susceptible to forest fire, disease, insect attack, soil compaction, overuse and abuse by man. The fish and wildlife within the area move about and change in numbers with changes in their environment. The waters of the Chattooga change with rainfall or drought and reflect the condition of the entire watershed.

A bench mark system is needed to inventory all the river's resources and evaluate their condition and trend. Some methods that might be used are infrared aerial photography to measure species composition in the overstory canopy, line transects on a plot or strip basis to measure all species in the understory along with size and rates of growth and camera points to record the nature of the general scenery. The location and numbers of rare plant species should be totally measured and recorded. The value of the bench mark system will be to provide as accurate record as possible of all ecological and geological changes occurring, both natural and man caused.



Only Experts Run the Lower Section



Whitesides Mountain

COST SUMMARY
(1970 Dollars)

Year	Development	Management
1st	$213,500	$ 74,000
2nd	91,800	79,000
3rd	91,400	105,000
4th	63,400	117,000
5th	68,100	145,000
Total	$528,200	$520,000

After the fifth year there will be $42,200 development to be done. More detailed cost estimates are in the parent report.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Launch sites	(51 canoes at one time)	11
Campsites	(134 people at one time)	10
Portages		14
Parking Lots	(320 cars at one time)	14
Hiking Trails	(Miles)	54
Access Trails	(2.5 miles)	6
Access Roads	(1.4 miles)	2
Remove Bridges		2
Cleanup & Removal of Undesirable Improvements		